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Libby City Council meeting agenda change involves mayor's

To the Editor:

Those who left the last city council meeting early missed some fun. The council changed the posted agenda so that the mayor's Millwood subdivision proposal would come at the end of the meeting after all other business.

When they deviate from normal practice in a manner that discourages public participation for the mayor's benefit, my corruption alarm goes off. Those of us who sat in the 110-degree room until the end of the meeting got to see business as usual at city hall. I expected better of this new council, and still do. They can still correct this.

Universal Land, with Mayor Berget as a principal, wants to make another subdivision of the property where Millwork West was relocated by Grace as part of the "cleanup" of city owned land.

The problem with this move arises out of the city's inability to address the violations of law that exist on this land, including the illegal septic system installed by the EPA for Millwork West, on land owned by the mayor and paid for by Grace.

Makes your head spin, doesn't it? Wait until we get to the parking lot drain and Port Authority storm sewer system.

The history of development by the mayor's corporation has been a rubber stamp of approval by all regulatory agencies concerned. When environmental, safety and health issues crop up, they are dealt with quietly. Remember the asphalt plant was quietly given a variance by the city to operate on this piece of ground.

It is hard to blame the regulatory agency in this case; sending a violation notice to your boss, espe-

cially one known for abusing his political position, is career suicide. The mayor's political influence cannot be discounted in this situation. This mayor has a history of using political influence for personal gain. The city has issued violation notices, they just don't seem willing to enforce the law.

The businesses who received violation notices have not just been victimized by an unscrupulous developer, they have been victimized by the city, which is obviously run by the developer. City government cannot extricate themselves from their collusion in this scandal if they continue to ignore the violations of law.

It amazes me that the mayor and EPA are protected while they break the law. EPA was well aware that they were breaking environmental law when they installed this system, they went out

of their way to avoid public disclosure of all of their dealings with the mayor, the city and Grace in moving Millwork West. If your average Joe were in this position, he would be labeled a criminal and subject to penalty. Political influence creates a class of citizens who are above the law, much like we saw with Grace and EPA historically. That hasn't been good for this town.

One business recently bought land in this subdivision, only to receive a violation notice almost immediately. Had the city taken enforcement action against the previous owner years ago, when they first identified the violation, the new owner would have known he was facing a \$40,000 penalty when he bought the land. Does anyone see a problem for the city in this move? By ignoring the violation with the previous owner, a

latest subdivision proposal

friend of the mayor, the city left the new owner holding the bag.

Another business recently bought land in this subdivision and built a new building, he too is facing a huge bill to comply with the law. The city issued the building permit and inspected it, yet the mayor's employee didn't require compliance with the code until council started asking questions. These folks were issued city business licenses even though the city knew they were violating city code. If the mayor and EPA are allowed to break the law, how can the city hold these others to a different standard?

These regulatory failures have

put the city in a position that is ripe for a lawsuit. The property owners feel they have been swindled, it's just a matter of selecting the entity most responsible for their grief. By continuing to allow the violations, the city digs themselves deeper into the litigation hole. Allowing further faulty development should cement the case. I'm predicting that the city will pick up the tab for the lawsuit while Universal Land avoids litigation.

This item is set to be on the agenda for the next council meeting on March 21. Come see how this new council reacts to the mayor's strong arm tactics.

D.C. Orr